

Hookah or Water Pipe Smoking Fact Sheet

A hookah is a water pipe used for smoking tobacco. Hookah tobacco is often flavored with molasses, fruit pulp or honey. This provides it with a sweeter smell and more appealing taste. In a typical hookah bar, patrons can purchase flavored tobacco and rent a water pipe to smoke it. Hookah smoking is usually a social event that allows the smokers to spend time together and talk as they pass the pipe around. Many hookahs bars also serve food and drinks. Hookah bars appealing to young adults may sell alcohol as well, although more traditional hookah bars do not.

The smoke is made by burning charcoal on top of the tobacco. When the smoker inhales through the tube of the hookah, a pressure difference forces air past the heating source and heats the tobacco, which gives off smoke. The smoke is pulled away from the tobacco and passes through the water and into the smoke chamber, where it is inhaled by the smoker. Hookah tobacco is purchased in blocks, ranging in price from \$6.00 - \$12.00 or squares from \$2.00 - \$4.00.

Smoking tobacco from hookah pipes is not safer than smoking cigarettes. During a single session, a hookah smoker may inhale as much smoke as if he had smoked 100 cigarettes. Hookah tobacco and smoke contain nicotine and all of the same cancer-causing agents found in other tobacco products.

Some people feel that hookah smoking is safer than cigarette smoking because the tobacco smoke is pulled through water before it is actually smoked. This is not true. Although the smoke may be smoother or less irritating, it contains the same toxic chemicals and carcinogens as any tobacco product and its smoke. In addition, the charcoal used to heat tobacco in the hookah increases the health-risks by producing high levels of carbon monoxide, metals, and cancer-causing chemicals.

Recent studies have found that hookah smokers actually inhale more nicotine than do cigarette smokers because of the massive volume of smoke they inhale. A typical one-hour session of hookah smoking exposes users to 100 to 200 times the volume of smoke inhaled from a single cigarette.

Just as cigarette smoking, hookah smoking can lead to respiratory disease, heart disease, and various types of cancer. A 2004 American Cancer Society (ACS) study found that men who smoked hookahs had five times the risk of lung cancer as non-smokers. Sharing the pipe with others may also spread contagious diseases.

As with all other types of tobacco smoke, secondhand smoke from hookah smoking poses a serious health risk to nonsmokers. Secondhand smoke from hookahs is just as dangerous as any other secondhand smoke. The protections provided by clean indoor air ordinances should apply to hookah bars just the same as they apply to all other bars and restaurants.

Hookah bars are increasingly found near college campuses or anywhere the tobacco industry is targeting a young adult market. Primary hookah smokers are 18-24 year olds. Many think smoking a hookah is less addicting and healthier than other tobacco use. Many young adults do not know or they under-appreciate the health risks of hookah smoking. Hookah smoking may cause the smoker to develop a nicotine addiction that can lead to habitual cigarette or hookah smoking and severe health consequences.

References:

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http://www.cancer.org/docroot/PED/content/PED_10_2x_Questions_About_Smoking_Tobacco_and_Health.asp

Kentucky Tobacco Prevention and Cessation Program
275 E. Main Street, Mail Stop 4 W-E
Frankfort, KY 40621
502-564-9358

<http://chfs.ky.gov/dph/ach/cd/tobacco.htm>

For assistance in quitting tobacco use,
contact 1-800-Quit Now, (1-800-784-8669)